

Photospot:

Hybrids between African and Green-breasted Pittas

Pitta angolensis ssp. and *P. (angolensis) reichenowi*

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Hybrides entre les Brèves d'Angola *Pitta angolensis* ssp. et à poitrine verte *P. (angolensis) reichenowi*. Les photos reproduites ici montrent deux hybrides apparents entre les Brèves d'Angola *Pitta angolensis* ssp. et à poitrine verte *P. (angolensis) reichenowi*, ce qui soulève une fois de plus la question de leur conspécificité.

The two photographs presented here (Figs. 2–3), previously published, respectively, on the back cover of *Bull. ABC* of March 2004 and in the last issue (14: 95), are reproduced again in direct comparison as both birds exhibit some interesting plumage features. Indeed, although both were originally labelled, without comment, as 'African Pitta *Pitta angolensis*', they appear to be hybrids between *P. angolensis* and Green-breasted Pitta *P. (angolensis) reichenowi*. Both are clearly adults, given their red belly. Their breast, however, is not wholly yellow-buff as in typical *P. angolensis*. In the bird from Nigeria (Fig. 2) the breast is mainly yellow-buff with an olive-green wash from the upper breast to the centre; in the Congolese bird (Fig. 3) the dominant colour is green, with perhaps a yellow wash down the middle. The Nigerian bird has a rather distinct dark patch, separating the throat from the breast, which is found only in *P. (a.) reichenowi* (Chapin 1953, Borrow & Demey 2001): it is either very indistinct or absent in the bird from Congo-Kinshasa. On the other

hand, both have the pinkish throat (as opposed to white) characteristic of *P. angolensis*.

The presumed locality of the Congolese bird, Basankusu (01°13'N 19°49'E), is rather unexpected, as this is well inside the range of *P. (a.) reichenowi* (Fig. 1). There are, however, too few specimens of pittas from northern Congo-Kinshasa to delimit the ranges of the taxa concerned with real accuracy. These two photographs are additional to seven museum specimens of hybrids: two from Brazzaville (Congo-Brazzaville), and five from Cameroon (see Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2004). As *P. angolensis* is at least partially migratory, some individuals could perhaps migrate to the middle Congo and hybridise with the local *P. (a.) reichenowi*. In any case, there is little doubt that the two taxa are very closely related and the number of hybrids, or birds with intermediate plumage, tends to support the views of those authors who treat them as conspecific (for a more detailed discussion, see Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2004).

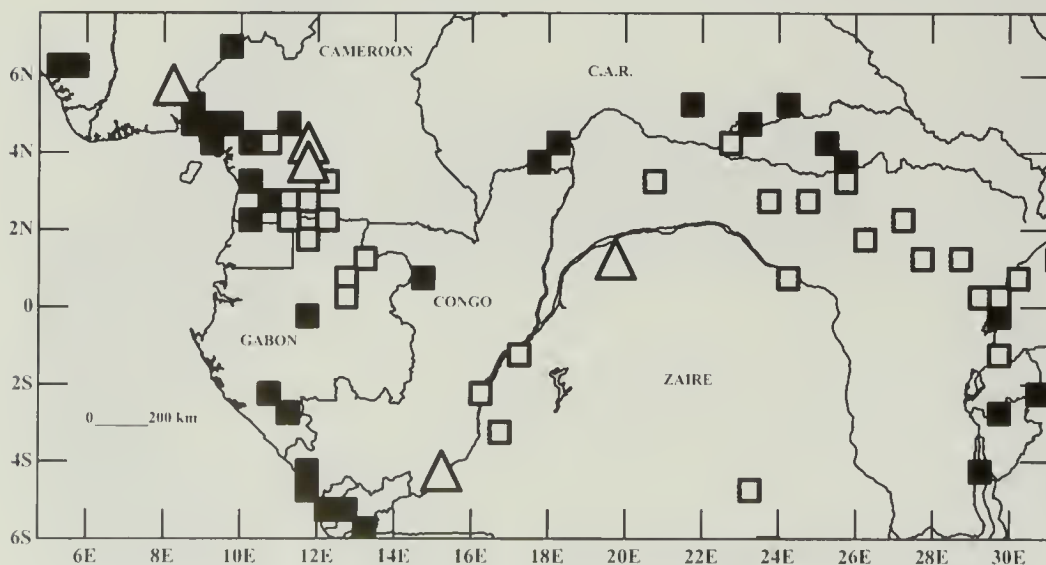


Figure 1. Map of distribution (30' squares) in central Africa of African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* (solid squares) and Green-breasted Pitta *P. (a.) reichenowi* (hollow squares), triangles showing locations of hybrid specimens.

Carte de distribution (carrés de 30') en Afrique centrale de la Brève d'Angola *Pitta angolensis* (carrés pleins) et de la Brève à poitrine verte *P. (a.) reichenowi* (carrés creux), les triangles indiquant les localités d'où proviennent des spécimens hybrides.



Figures 2–3. Pittas showing intermediate plumage characters between African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* ssp. and Green-breasted Pitta *P. (a.) reichenowi*, 1 from Cross River National Park in south-east Nigeria (Guus Hak), and 2 from Basankusu, central Congo-Kinshasa (Filip Verbelen)

Brèves arborant un plumage intermédiaire entre celui de la Brève d'Angola *Pitta angolensis* ssp. et la Brève à poitrine verte *P. (a.) reichenowi*, 1 provenant du Cross River National Park, Nigeria du sud-est (Guus Hak), et 2 de Basankusu, au centre du Congo-Kinshasa (Filip Verbelen)

Figure 4. Green-breasted Pitta / Brève à poitrine verte *Pitta (angolensis) reichenowi*, Biteye, Cameroon, 17 September 1910 (Guy M. Kirwan © The Natural History Museum, Tring)

Figure 5. African Pitta / Brève d'Angola *Pitta angolensis*, Mzimba district, Nyasaland, 4 December 1937 (Guy M. Kirwan © The Natural History Museum, Tring)

References

- Borrow, N. & Demey, R. 2001. *Birds of Western Africa*. London, UK: Christopher Helm.
- Chapin, J. P. 1953. The birds of the Belgian Congo. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 75A: 1–821.
- Dowsett-Lemaire, F. & Dowsett, R. J. 2004. Letter: First photograph of a hybrid African × Green-breasted Pitta *Pitta angolensis* ssp. × *P. (angolensis) reichenowi*. *Bull. ABC* 11: 183.

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